Special Plenary Session of the People's Chamber of the German Democratic Republic on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the start of the Second World War on 1 September 1989

Documents on the policy of the German Democratic Republic

3/1989

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On 1 September 1989, the supreme representative body of the German Democratic Republic assembled in Berlin, capital of the GDR, to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the outbreak of the Second World War.

Horst Sindermann, President of the People's Chamber of the GDR, opened the Special Plenary Session of the People's Chamber with words of remembrance.

The Members of the House, together with representatives of the Polish People's Republic participating in the event, observed a minute of silence to honour the millions of war victims.

Oskar Fischer, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the GDR, addressed the House on behalf of the government of the GDR.

HORST SINDERMANN
President of the People's Chamber
of the German Democratic Republic

Words of remembrance

Honourable Members of the House,
I declare the Special Plenary Session of the People's Chamber of the German Democratic Republic to mark the 50th anniversary of the beginning of the Second World War open.

I have the honour of welcoming Mrs Teresa Katarzyna Dobielinska-Eliszewska, Vice-Marshal of the Sejm of the Polish People's Republic, and Mr Jozef Czyrek, Minister of State with the President of the Polish People's Republic, who are present here at this session.

Moreover, I have the privilege of greeting Mr Boleslaw Kulski, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Polish People's Republic, and Mr Janusz Mrowiec, Director of the State Minister's cabinet.

Dear Polish Friends, we bid you a welcome here in the spirit of anti-fascist resistance which has been kept alive in this House, whose most prominent representatives were among those who founded our State and belonged to the first members of this democratically elected Parliament, and who have passed on the noble idea of friendship with the people of Poland from generation to generation.

This morning, at the Monument of the Polish Soldier and the German Anti-Fascist Fighter, we were handed an appeal from the participants in the children's and young people's exchange

scheme organized between Berlin, capital of the GDR, and Warsaw, capital of the Polish People's Republic. The young people made a point of stating in this appeal that they have the right to live in peace and that this is the slogan of their struggle.

Fifty years to this day, on 1 September 1939, the fascist regime in Germany insidiously invaded neighbouring Poland, thus unleashing the Second World War, the greatest military confrontation in the history of mankind. It was the second time in our century that a war had emanated from German soil.

1 September 1939, at the same time, ushered in the severest crime against humanity, which claimed more than 50 million people's lives.

We treasure the memory of those who lost their lives during the Second World War:

- over 20.6 million citizens of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics,
- 6 million people of Polish nationality,
- 500,000 citizens of the United States of America,
- 30,000 citizens of Canada,
- 390,000 citizens of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland,
- 650,000 citizens of the French Republic,
- 1.7 million citizens of Yugoslavia,
- 6 million Germans,
- 485,000 Austrians,
- 410,000 Italians,
- 460,000 Romanians,
- 420,000 Hungarians,
- 520,000 Greeks,
- 51,700 Bulgarians,
- 400,000 Czechs and Slovaks,
- 210,000 citizens of the Kingdom of the Netherlands,
- 88,000 citizens of the Kingdom of Belgium,
- 10,300 citizens of the Kingdom of Norway and

– tens of thousands of citizens of the Kingdom of Denmark, the Republic of Finland and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, as well as 28,000 Albanians.

We honour the memory of the

– 11 million Chinese and that of the 2 million Japanese who fell in the East-Asian theatre of war.

We honour the memory of the

– 280,000 inhabitants of Hiroshima and Nagasaki who fell victim to the atomic bombing.

We bow to the victims of the fascist programme of mass extermination:

Over 11 million people from many nations, among them 8 million Jews, were tortured to death, shot dead or brutally murdered in concentration camps and gas chambers, in prisons, forced labour camps, ghettoes and extermination camps.

I thank you for having risen from your seats in honour of those who fell victim to the Second World War.

On this day of remembrance, we, the members of the supreme people's assembly of the German Democratic Republic, acting on behalf of our people, again pledge to all the world's nations:

Our policy will always be determined–both in word and deed–by the peoples' urgent desire for peace and good-neighbourly cooperation. We in the German Democratic Republic consider it our sacred duty constantly and consistently to see to it that no more war, but only peace, emanates from German soil.

Now I give Comrade Oskar Fischer, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the German Democratic Republic, leave to speak.

OSKAR FISCHER
Minister of Foreign Affairs of the GDR

Address on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the start of the Second World War

Comrade President,
Distinguished Deputies,
Madam Vice-Marshal,
Comrade Minister of State,
Distinguished Heads of Diplomatic Missions,
Friends and Comrades,

Fifty years ago today, Nazi Germany unleashed the Second World War. Poland became the first victim of a war of conquest which then spilled over into Europe and the whole world.

"We have been returning fire since 5.45 hours. From now on bomb will be met by bomb."

Using this brazen lie on the first of September 1939 Hitler wanted to stamp Poland as the aggressor and to justify the predatory attack on the eastern neighbour as an unavoidable act of defence. That which German Communists had been warning against long before the Nazis' bid for power: "A vote for Hitler is a vote for war", became an appalling truth.

The first of September is a day of remembrance and mourning.

The Second World War was the most devastating and most horrible of all wars in human history. It engulfed 72 States and it involved the participation, directly or indirectly, of about four fifth of the world's population. Over 50 million people were killed. They

fell at the fronts or perished in the hail of bombs. 35 million people were mutilated. The end of the war saw 20 million children orphaned. For millions of men, women and children of Jewish origin the fascist order to carry out the so-called "final solution" meant their cold-blooded, cruel extermination.

In paying homage to the victims of fascism and war here today we are first and foremost reaffirming our pledge to do everything in our power to ensure that war and fascism never again threaten our lives and the lives of our children. This pledge, distinguished Deputies, remains alive and remains the supreme political doctrine in the German Democratic Republic.

The first of September is a day of reflection.

Two decades after the First World War, the Second World War came as a consequence of the policies which the most reactionary quarters of German industrial and financial capital had been pursuing after their defeat of 1918; it was the direct consequence of the rise of fascism in Germany. From the Nazi takeover in January 1933 there led a straight path to the first of September 1939. This was noted repeatedly during the Nuremberg trials of the major war criminals, including by Colonel Pokrovsky on behalf of the Soviet prosecution who quoted the following phrase from a Nazi pamphlet published as early as 1934: "It is impossible to imagine National Socialism without war."

Having enforced the "new order" in Germany, the German fascists were bent on establishing the "new order" of Europe and the "new order" of the world. Europe and indeed the world were to become fascist; all dissenters were to be destroyed and eradicated. What the Nazis wanted was a Europe without a workers' movement, without Communists, Social Democrats and free trade unions, without middle-class democrats, humanists and Jews. The Russians, Poles, Czechs, Slovaks and other peoples were to serve as the labour-slaves of the "Germanic master race". But above all, the first socialist state in the world, the Soviet Union, was to be erased from the world map.

"This is the point of the war for us: Our fight is not for ideals; it

is for the Ukrainian wheat fields, the Caucasian oil, the wealth of the world. We want to line our pockets." This was the goal for which the German imperialists and militarists unscrupulously staked the existence of nations, in fact all human life. That overtly and brazenly announced Nazi concept was recalled in the manifesto of 11 June 1945, in which the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Germany called on the German people to build an anti-fascist and democratic Germany.

The German workers' movement opposed the war, but it was their misfortune that divisions split the movement and the forces for peace of the nation; it was their misfortune, the Communist Party of Germany noted, "that broad sections of the population had lost their elementary sense of decency and justice and followed Hitler when he promised them richly laden lunch and dinner tables at the expense of other peoples, accomplished by means of war and looting".

It was the Communists who headed the anti-fascist resistance struggle in Germany. Their knowledge of the inherent link between fascism and war made them the most active and most resolute fighters. The Communists recognized that only the unity of action of the working class and a popular front could topple the Nazi dictatorship from within the country. Therefore they were anxious to forge an anti-fascist coalition on German soil, which would range, beside the working class with its organizations, the peasants and farmers, intellectuals and the lower and upper middle classes as well as all the other opponents of the Hitler regime, from Christian believers to military officers and generals with a sense of responsibility, in order that they may fight the battle united.

Anti-communist blindness, nationalism and the narrow-minded egoism of parties and groups prevented the emergence of such a coalition. Pastor Martin Niemöller, unforgotten, said in description of the typical attitude of many non-communist opponents of the Nazi regime: "When the Nazis took away the Communists, I remained silent for I was not a Communist. When they imprisoned

the Social Democrats, I remained silent for I was not a Social Democrat. When they took away the trade unionists, I did not protest for I was not a trade unionist. When they came to take me away, there was nobody left to protest ..."

After the defeat of the democratic forces in Germany only an international anti-fascist alliance could save the peace. Anyone who did not see that fascism meant war had failed to take notice of Hitler's book "Mein Kampf", which was written as early as 1923/24. What was set down on paper there was turned into cruel reality as from 1933. Only at a later stage, in the concentration camps and jails, did Communists and Social Democrats, Christians and Jews, be they workers or intellectuals, join together to resist the fascist tormentors.

In the darkness of the Nazi rule imposed on Germany, the Soviet Union was the only country to work untiringly against the impending threat to international peace and to take a resolute stand for a system of collective security in Europe. Such a system could have well relied on the broad anti-fascist popular movement in Europe and averted the Second World War. This historic chance was missed because ruling imperialist circles put their class interests above the interests of humanity. Anti-communism, mistrust and ideological entrenchment, together with the hope on the part of such people to be able to destroy socialism with Hitler's help did not permit that which was reasonable and indispensable. They wanted a Europe without the first socialist state and failed to realize that peace in Europe had become indivisible. Their policy of appeasement encouraged the fascist aggressors to render massive assistance in crushing the democratic republic in Spain, to dare to annex Austria, and to dismember and to eliminate Czechoslovakia. Italy felt encouraged to invade Abyssinia and Albania.

The disgraceful Munich Agreement not only sanctioned the partitioning of the Czechoslovak State, but also pushed the Soviet Union into an isolated foreign-policy position; it cut the ground from under a collective security system in Europe and opened to the Nazis the way eastward. Hitler saw his view that the Western Pow-

ers were at that moment not ready for an alliance with the Soviet Union confirmed; thus he was able and willing to venture war in the east. To camouflage his intentions he offered the Soviet Union a non-aggression treaty in the summer of 1939. Whilst the Soviet Union saw in this offer the chance of gaining a breathing space in which to continue its efforts in peace, it was to become obvious later on that the breach of the treaty was included in the calculations of the Nazi leadership right from the start. Their notorious decree No. 21 of 18 November 1940 said: "The German Wehrmacht must be prepared to defeat also ... Soviet Russia in a swift campaign ... but it is decisive that the intention to attack remains indiscernible."

With the attack on the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941 the front of the Second World War was opened up where Hitler, as predicted by Ernst Thälmann, was to come a cropper.

In the subjugated countries popular struggles for national existence and independence, democracy and social progress developed. After the attack by the Nazi armies on the Soviet Union the governments of the Western Powers also came under pressure from democratic public opinion in their own countries and could no longer avoid forming an anti-Hitler coalition with the USSR. This alliance, unique in history, united about 50 States of the world in a common anti-fascist effort. It still serves as graphic evidence that States with diametrically opposed social systems can and must cooperate for the sake of peace, and in the interests of human survival today.

The victory of the anti-Hitler coalition over Nazi Germany and its allies also brought freedom to our nation and offered the opportunity of making a new beginning. Of all the contributions and the sacrifices made, those of the Soviet Union were the biggest. This will never be forgotten.

Europe saw the beginning of the longest period of peace this century.

The decisions of the conferences at Tehran, Yalta und Potsdam laid the foundations for the European post-war order. These deci-

sions as well as the developments on our continent sealed by the treaties between the USSR, the GDR and other socialist countries on the one hand and the Federal Republic of Germany on the other and by the signing of the Helsinki Final Act 30 years after the end of the Second World War have been and remain the buttresses of peace and security in Europe.

The first of September remains a day of accountability.

This applies specifically to the Germans. They are rightly expected to see to it that war will never again emanate from German soil.

The German Democratic Republic, which has emerged from German history and which faces up to it, has responded to this challenge since the very first day of its existence. In the 40 years since its foundation it has proved—as its President Wilhelm Pieck demanded in the first speech following his election on 11 October 1949—its willingness to cooperate with other nations peacefully and democratically.

The inception of the German peace state was the crucial national answer to 1 September 1939. The German Democratic Republic has and retains an obligation to the millions of fighters of the anti-Hitler coalition and the anti-fascist resistance. Fascism must never occur again. This remains the essential historical lesson to be drawn from the unleashing of the Second World War. Our State has recognized the results of that war, accepted and shouldered its responsibility, paid reparations and punished Nazi and war criminals. Above all, it acted in conformity with the Potsdam Agreement to clear up the intellectual debris left behind in the people's minds by the evil spirit of Nazism, and has educated its people, particularly its youth, in the spirit of international friendship and love for peace.

The anti-fascist and democratic transformation laid the foundations for the socialist development of our State. In our country, anti-fascism has become State policy, and is the basic feature of education, arts and sciences. Thus the resurgence of right-wing extremism and of neo-Nazism and the evil spirit of Hitler's SS bo-

dyguards in the FRG and West Berlin remind us to be all the more vigilant. Once again it has become evident that the phrase "The womb is fertile yet from which that crept" still applies to those parts of German soil.

Distinguished Deputies,
The efforts of the German Democratic Republic for peace have met and meet with approval and appreciation throughout the world. They have been and remain a significant factor in European politics and beyond.

– As early as the beginning of the 1950s we concluded the agreement on the Oder-Neisse peace frontier with Poland, our eastern neighbour, and thus laid the basis for a lasting friendship between the GDR and the Polish People's Republic. Historically, this was a necessary as well as a far-sighted step, which is still fiercely opposed in the other German State, in particular by those who cannot resign themselves to the fact that their power ends at the Elbe river.

The statement made by our first President Wilhelm Pieck on 12 November 1952 to the effect that the GDR, on its part, will never again tolerate a war being waged from the German side against the French people, was unanimously welcomed in Western Europe.

– By securing its western borders in the early 1960s the GDR guaranteed tranquillity and security for socialism and helped to protect the peoples of Europe from a new military inferno.

– In the 1970s, the socialist German State made constructive contributions to the set of East-West agreements in Europe and consequently to the Helsinki Final Act, thus aiding the emergence of a European peace order.

– In the 1980s we courageously advocated nuclear and conventional disarmament and, in so doing, helped overcome the "speechlessness" between East and West and scale down confrontation. It was the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany and Chairman of the Council

of State, Erich Honecker, who in November 1983 countered the arms build-up in terms of intermediate-range nuclear missile deployments with a policy of dialogue under the motto "NOW MORE THAN EVER". He insisted that these devilish devices should disappear. We did not want a situation to arise in which, as was said, "the Germans can only look at one another through a fence of missiles".

– With its initiative for zones free of nuclear and chemical weapons and for a zone of confidence in Central Europe and its decision to reduce, unilaterally and independently of international negotiations, its National People's Army by 10,000 troops, 600 tanks and 50 aircraft and to cut defence spending by 10 per cent this State has set another signal thus contributing to a scaling down of military confrontation in Europe at the threshold to the 1990s.

Today, fifty years after the outbreak of the Second World War our country lives in harmony with the peoples of Europe and the world. Ties of heartfelt friendship link us with the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Poles and Czechoslovaks, the first victims of that erstwhile aggression, are our friends and good neighbours.

The outcome of the Second World War has fundamentally changed Europe and the world. Opportunities arose to make peace enduring. In the middle of our continent, this process has been closely linked with the emergence and development of the German Democratic Republic. It has become and remains today evident: The greater the GDR's stability, the safer the peace of Europe!

Distinguished Deputies,
War must never be fought again, whether nuclear or conventional, whether worldwide or in Europe. This is the message on this day, the anniversary of the outbreak of the Second World War fifty years ago today.

The peoples of the world see the Joint Soviet-American Statement of 21 November 1985 as an encouragement of their belief that globally war must no longer be a means of conducting policy

and that in the nuclear and space age conflicts can and must be resolved exclusively by political means. The world of today has become too small for war politics and war. War has to be defeated in peace.

While a number of the world's States could still avoid the direct effects of the Second World War for reasons of history, geography and time, a third world war would not leave this option open.

The question of peace as the paramount question of our time is a matter of TO BE or NOT TO BE for mankind.

Certainly, the responsibility for world peace has lain and lies, above all, with the USSR and the USA and their respective allies in the two military coalitions. On the other hand, however, it must be everybody's concern to strive for peace, united, persistently and purposefully, to grasp every chance, however slim, in order to prevent potential conflicts occurring and to defuse existing ones.

In view of the danger looming, the World Committee Against Fascism and War in 1935 addressed an appeal to the people all over the world saying: "Wherever forces of peace, however small, start to move, it is essential to support them by all means possible."

Today, peace can and must be safeguarded primarily through a worldwide coalition of all forces of reason and realism.

The first of September has become World Peace Day, a day of action and confidence. At the threshold to the year 2000 humanity's ancient dream of eternal peace is no longer utopian. For the first time in history, the strength of socialism, which creates peace because it needs peace, and the awakening world conscience offer the possibility of banishing war for ever from the life of the peoples of the world.

The prevention of war requires material, political and legal guarantees against war and for peoples living peacefully side by side; the prevention of war requires, above all, a willingness to undertake such commitments. The German Democratic Republic is pre-

pared to do so. To this end it has a widely agreeable and hence sustainable concept, which it shares with its allies:

What we are anxious to achieve is

Firstly,
the elimination of ALL means of warfare. This has always been the preoccupation and ideal of humanist thought. What mankind's survival requires today is the replacement of arms build-up and arms competition by arms limitation and disarmament. That this is feasible has been shown by the treaty on the elimination of the Soviet and American land-based intermediate- and shorter-range missiles.

Is it not logical now to press for the reduction of the many existing short-range nuclear arms rather than for their modernization? We are in favour of new zero options.

It is the aim of the Vienna negotiations on conventional armed forces to deprive both sides of their capabilities for surprise attack– yet this will not be possible as long as tactical nuclear arms remain deployed. What we need is not only no pause in but rather a quicker pace of disarmament so that all these "devilish devices" can disappear from the arsenals. Through their unilateral moves the socialist countries have contributed substantially to creating the conditions necessary for achieving this end.

At the threshold to the year 2000, it can certainly be an aim for all to relieve Europe and the entire globe not merely of nuclear arms, but of all kinds and all types of offensive weapons, of the threat of war generally.

That would be an example and a source of encouragement to the whole world, and naturally all this would require mutual verification. Disarmament, too, prompts considerable expenditure and great intellectual and physical efforts are needed to destroy means of mass destruction and sophisticated weapons systems safely.

It is however safer and less costly to forego new armaments.

Secondly,
the complementation of disarmament by a mechanism of safeguarding peace, through which peaceful coexistence and cooperation will take the place of enmity and confrontation. The hitherto mutually opposing military security precautions are to be replaced by a wide range of common non-military security factors and guarantees. Both sides will have to structure and deploy their armed forces in such a way as to preclude offensive operations generally. There is a popular demand for international relations in which arms reductions and wider cooperation in the political, economic, ecological and humanitarian fields will create a climate of trust allowing the settlement of problems exclusively by political means. This also implies being able to deal with one another in a new way, to rid oneself of prejudice and not to regard "any other State or people as an enemy". These aims have already been set out in the military doctrine of the Warsaw Treaty States adopted in Berlin. It is high time for the West to follow this example without any further delay rather than pressing on with its dangerous arms programmes.

Thirdly,
the existence for as long as forty years of two sovereign German States independent from each other, has become an essential element of East-West relations and the European peace order. Their bearing vis-a-vis each other can have a beneficial effect on the situation in Europe, or they can complicate it. It is up to them to make their relationship an example of peaceful coexistence and thus promote significantly a more stable European peace order.

I want to repeat at this point: Both German States, i.e. the Federal Republic of Germany as well, share a specific historical responsibility vis-a-vis the peoples of Europe and the world to do their utmost to ensure that war will never again emanate from German soil—only peace. This fundamental duty was expressly set out both in the Treaty on the Bases of Relations of December 1972 and in the Joint Communique of 8 September 1987 on the official visit

of the General Secretary of the SED Central Committee and Chairman of the Council of State, Erich Honecker, to the FRG. Historical responsibility demands that both sides show reason and realism. This requires that the realities which have evolved in the wake of post-war developments finally be acknowledged and accepted as elements of peace and stability in Europe.

The Federal Republic has to abandon the totally unfounded claim to solely represent and take care of all Germans; it has to abandon any claims to foreign territories and cease irresponsible talk about re-establishing the "German Reich in the frontiers of 1937". What is necessary, however, is the willingness to achieve genuine disarmament, to bring about incapacity for attack for its armed forces and to abandon all daydreams.

What is needed is constructive dialogue at various levels and in all areas of public life. Both States can play their part in their respective alliances and help ensure that at the dividing line between NATO and the Warsaw Treaty the danger of military clashes will decrease and common security increase. Proposals and offers to this effect have been made by the GDR and other socialist countries. Suffice it to recall here that our Minister of National Defence has stated his preparedness to meet the Defence Minister of the Federal Republic.

Fourthly,
in Europe, from which two world wars started, the system of East-West treaties and the Helsinki Final Act offer more favourable conditions than ever before for exclusively peaceful coexistence. What has been achieved so far through joint efforts in East and West has proved to be viable, and this is the direction in which we want to and must proceed.

Incompatible with this approach however are all attempts by certain quarters in NATO countries to exert political, ideological and economic pressure on socialist countries or to give them "good advice" to "move", as they put it, to induce them to give up their social system step by step. It is only logical that such attacks

against socialism should go hand in in hand with efforts to call into question the present territorial realities in Europe.

On this very day it is therefore appropriate to restate in unambiguous terms:

Those who try to question realities, in particular European frontiers, who keep raising revanchist slogans, who interfere in the internal affairs of socialist States, are in fact undermining the foundations of the European post-war order and are playing with fire.

What the head of our delegation, Erich Honecker, said in his statement on 30 July 1975 in Helsinki at the end of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe remains fully valid:

"The lessons of history and the current requirements of European politics make respect for, and recognition of, the principle of the inviolability of frontiers the decisive factor. The security of the European States has always consisted, first and foremost, in the security of their frontiers. The terrible wars that devastated our continent in this century were the result of a policy which, whatever the pretext, started from the violation of existing frontiers, from disregard for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of other States. Recognition of the principle of the inviolability of frontiers remains the criterion by which to judge whether or not a policy really serves peace and, thus, the interests of man."

Fifthly,
we share the view held both in East and West that the division of Europe can be gradually overcome whilst due regard is paid to its various social structures, and that a new era of all-European cooperation can be launched resting on the political and territorial conditions as they have emerged as a result of the Second World War. He who wants to fully overcome the spiritual burden inherited from the War, including the cold war, has to accept, without ifs and buts, the differences in the social systems and take the world as it is.

That is the road to a common European home in which the European peoples will live together in peace. It is to be a home in

which each people can feel happy in its own apartment, and live free from tutelage and free from outside interference, in which equal rights are respected and all tenants endeavour, in a spirit of harmony and goodneighbourliness, to make "European home" more and more comfortable.

Only such a cooperation, distinguished Deputies, has a future.

To play its part at all times in shaping such a future is the pledge of our Republic, relying on the solid and dependable achievements of its working people, because this is in line with its historical responsibility and its socialist character.

"Work, bread and peace for the people"—that is how the world we want and we are going to build will look.

PANORAMA DDR—Auslandspresseagentur GmbH
Wilhelm Pieck Strasse 49, Berlin, DDR-1054
Translation: Intertext
Verlag Zeit im Bild
Julian Grimau Allee, Dresden, DDR-8012
Printed in the German Democratic Republic
by Grafischer Grossbetrieb Völkerfreundschaft Dresden
9264-2

ANORAMA DDR